

Potential effects of demands in academia – preliminary investigations

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METHODS

The aim was to compile a descriptive overview of stressful demands in academia. A diverse range of international literature (<10 years) was reviewed to explore expectations and responsibilities of academics in the context of effects that could adversely impact on critical and creative thinking required of university academics. Papers were reviewed based on the question “*What are current expectations and demands in academia?*” This preliminary exploratory phase was supplemented with personal observations and informative discussions.

RESULTS

In addition to demands of preparing and delivering undergraduate and postgraduate learning materials for increasing numbers of students, academics cope with rapid advances in technology, increasing administrative demands, challenges and responsibilities associated with culturally and linguistically diverse students, and an increasingly competitive funding environment. ‘Evidence’ of teaching quality is based on non-validated instruments and unrepresentative samples yet may be used to calculate teaching scores; research productivity is based on quantifiable metrics many of which favour one research type. A managerialist approach, increasing bureaucracy and a premise of quantity pervade the reviewed literature.

DISCUSSION

Primarily non-quantifiable qualities and attributes of academics lie at the core of effective learning, teaching, research and governance. Competing expectations and demands are complex and are compounded by the intrinsic motivators that drive many academics. Performance measures often do not reflect demands, while mentoring, duty of care, motivation, and enthusiasm are expected and essential characteristics of academics. It is suggested that flexible performance measures and innovative human resource management systems may shift the focus from competitive management to motivational leadership.